

CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL LANDMARKS SERIES

Edited by Vernon Aubrey Neasham

PARENT WASHINGTON NAVEL ORANGE

Registered Landmark #20

by

Lois Ann Woodward

for

State of California, Department of Natural Resources

Division of Parks

Berkeley, 1936

Written under auspices of Works Progress Administration
District #8, Project #65-3-3218, Symbol #1873

PARENT WASHINGTON NAVEL ORANGE

In Riverside, the Washington Navel Orange was first successfully introduced into California by Mrs. Eliza Tibbets, who planted two trees in her yard in 1873 or 1875. From these trees grew the large navel orange industry of California. The seedling orange was brought into California by the Franciscan missionaries who transplanted orange trees from Spain and Mexico in the mission gardens. The seedlings possessed many poor qualities, so that the orange was not profitably cultivated in a commercial way until after 1880. Then the Tibbets Washington navel orange trees produced such a fine type of fruit that the orange growers of Southern California grafted their seedlings with buds from them.

The orange industry was revolutionized by the discovery of the popular new variety. Uniform in size and appearance and having long-lasting qualities, the Washington Navel supplied the need for a superior commercial product. The two original parent trees were transplanted and preserved as a memorial by the people of Riverside.

The navel orange derives its name from the navel-like depression in the blossom end of the fruit, which often resembles a smaller, second orange. Citrus fruits are frequently variable, and the navel orange is one of the variations which tends toward double or superimposed fruit.

Although some have many seeds, most of them have few or none and are propagated by budding. Navel oranges have been known for hundreds of years. As early as 1646, John Baptiste Ferrarius, in his book, "The Hesperides, or about the Golden Apples, their culture and use," describes an orange which was one of the navel type, but not the Washington Navel as California knows it.¹

The Washington Navel Orange was first introduced into the United States from Bahia, Brazil, in 1870 by Mr. Saunders of the Department of Agriculture. He has been credited with its discovery. However, investigation proves that this orange was a well known product in world markets some years before Mr. Saunders obtained his first trees from Brazil. Concerning this, Dr. Coit, in his "History of the Washington Navel or Bahia Orange," writes:²

Orange trees were taken to the Brazils by the Spaniards at a very early day, and were more or less widely planted in those parts of the country best suited to their culture. Somewhere about the year 1820, or possibly earlier, there appeared near the village of Bahia a form of navel orange which was remarkable for its many good qualities. This was what we know as the 'Washington Navel'. It was hastily

-
1. J. E. Coit, "The history of the Washington Navel or Bahia Orange" in the California Cultivator, XXXVIII, No. 16, April, 1912, 483-485.
 2. Ibid.

propagated and planted to a considerable extent. Specimens were sent to London, and the form became known abroad under the name Bahia, after the village where it originated.

Mr. Saunders secured twelve trees of the Bahia navel through a missionary located there. Mr. Judson, the United States consul at Bahia, also knew of the navel orange, which grew wild in Brazilian swamps, and it is uncertain whether Mr. Saunders or Mr. Judson was responsible for sending the trees to the United States.³ The trees received by Mr. Saunders in 1870, however, were the first of the true Bahian navel orange to be brought successfully into the United States.⁴

All of the twelve trees received by Mr. Saunders

-
3. Jessie Edna Boyd, Historical import of the orange industry in Southern California, 100-110.
 4. Characteristic of the navel orange is a tendency to "sport" or bear occasional fruit differing from that of the rest of the tree, and of inferior quality. Dr. J. Elliot Coit in "History of the Washington Navel or Bahia Orange" in the California Cultivator, XXXVIII, No. 16, April, 1912, 483-485, says that most Brazilian orange growers, aware of the navel's sporting habit, selected only the best buds for propagation. The peasants, however, to meet the increasing market demand, unwittingly propagated both kinds. The stock in the Brazilian market came to include trees of true Bahia, the false type and many mixed forms. Many trees called Bahian navels, but actually the false form, were introduced into England, Portugal, Australia, and other countries. Some of this stock was brought into the United States from England and Australia. All of these trees turned out to be the false form. The true Bahia navel was not successfully introduced into the United States until Mr. Saunders secured his trees directly from Bahia in 1870.

were the true Bahia navel orange. Placed in the greenhouse of the Department of Agriculture at Washington, they were indiscriminately used as a source of buds to propagate other trees for distribution. Many of these were shipped, later, to Florida and California. The twelve originals, for some reason, probably lack of care, passed out of existence. The real importance of the Washington Navel was not realized until the trees propagated from the originals and sent to Mrs. Tibbets in California came into bearing about 1877.⁵

About 1870, Judge North began the settlement of Riverside, California. Anxious to obtain settlers for his colony, he advertised it widely in the eastern states. Luther C. Tibbets and his wife, Eliza, took up a homestead in the new community. Previous to her departure for California, Mrs. Tibbets visited the gardens of the Department of Agriculture at Washington and asked Mr. Saunders, who was in charge of the department, for some fruit trees to take to Riverside. Among the trees Mrs. Tibbets obtained were three young Bahian navel oranges.⁶

The trees were successfully transported to Riverside, California, where the Tibbets planted them in their

5. Coit, "The history of the Washington Navel or Bahia Orange," in the California Cultivator, XXXVIII, No. 16, April, 1912, 483-485.

6. Ibid.

garden. The exact date when the trees were planted has often been disputed and remains uncertain. The date on a tablet erected in honor of Mrs. Tibbets is given as 1873.⁷ Jessie Edna Boyd, in her thesis, on "The Historical Import of the Orange Industry in California" says:

James Boyd emphatically denies that the trees were planted in 1873 and to prove his point quotes L. S. Wright who settled in Riverside in 1875. '... I saw the trees planted in the spring of 1875, when I was on my way to school. When I was passing Mrs. Tibbets called me to see the trees planted.'

Mrs. Tibbets cared for the small trees which grew beside her cottage. It is said that Mrs. Tibbets, because of the lack of water in the country at that time, kept the trees alive by pouring over their young roots the water from her dishpan. Within a few years they came into bearing. The oranges produced were of such a fine quality and appearance that they attracted widespread interest among the local fruit growers in the year 1877-1878. In 1879, the Tibbets navel oranges won first prize at the citrus fair held by the Southern California Horticultural Society.

Neighbors of the Tibbets, Sam McCoy and Josiah Cover, secured the first available buds from the trees and grafted

7. Boyd, Historical import of the orange industry in Southern California, 100-110.

their groves with them.⁸ Later sold to B. B. Barney, these trees flourished until removed in 1921. Many other orchardists hastened to rebud their trees with the Tibbets' navel orange. Some growers, fearful that the stock would deteriorate, waited. After the second season, however, when the crop was even larger and produced better fruit than ever, there was a great furor of grafting. Orange growers throughout the county budded their old seedling groves to the new fruit. The excitement over the successful experiment with the new type of orange spread to the other orange districts of Southern California. Specimens were exhibited and shown throughout the State. Buds from the Tibbets trees and those of other orchards which began to bear found a ready market at a high price.

The groves of navel orange trees proved profitable to their owners. The new popular variety brought a higher price in the market than any of the seedlings or other varieties. Usually seedless, or almost so, and of fine uniform appearance, the navel orange was considered superior in every respect. In 1884, at the cotton exhibition at New Orleans, Washington Navels, displayed with twenty other varieties of oranges from Riverside, won the first prize over Florida fruit.⁹

8. James Boyd, History of San Bernardino and Riverside counties, 427.

9. Boyd, Historical import of the orange industry in Southern California, 100-110.

In Riverside, the Bahia Navel was commonly called the Washington Navel because of the fact that Mrs. Tibbets had secured it in Washington. In 1883, the people of Riverside, for advertising purposes, wished to call it the Riverside Washington Navel. That name was opposed by other Southern California orange districts and the name Washington Navel was retained. Riverside, however, received nation wide publicity and fame as the first producer of the Washington Navel Orange and as one of the greatest orange districts in the world.

The Tibbets trees and homestead passed out of the hands of Mr. Tibbets into possession of Louis Jacobs. Mr. Jacobs allowed the Tibbets to live in a small cottage on the place until after Mrs. Tibbets' death. Mr. Jacobs gave one of the original trees to Frank A. Miller, proprietor of the famous Glenwood Mission Inn. It was transplanted there with elaborate ceremony May 7, 1903. Theodore Roosevelt, president of the United States at that time, a guest at the inn, assisted on that occasion.¹⁰ That tree died but was replaced by another budded from the original. The other original Bahia orange tree, still bearing fine fruit, was transplanted to a small park at the head of Magnolia Avenue adjoining the land where Mrs. Tibbets first planted the two famous orange

10. A. Drury, California: an intimate guide, 122.

trees beside her cottage door.

While she lived, Mrs. Tibbets received little of the credit she deserved for her part in bringing the two trees to Riverside and for her care of them. After her death and her recognition as the individual directly responsible for the introduction of the Washington Navel Orange into California, a memorial was erected in 1920, in her honor, by Aurantia Chapter, D. A. R., in the park at the head of Magnolia and Arlington avenues. It stands in front of the one remaining original tree transplanted there from Mrs. Tibbets' garden. Inscribed on the tablet are the words:

To Honor
Mrs. Eliza Tibbets
And to commend her good work
In planting at Riverside in 1873
The First Washington Navel Trees in California
Native to Bahia, Brazil,
Proved to be the most valuable fruit
Introduction yet made by the
United States Department of Agriculture.

AUTHORITIES

Printed Material

I. Bibliographical Aids:

1. Cowan, Robert Ernest, and Cowan, Robert Granniss. A bibliography of the history of California, 1510-1930. 3v. San Francisco, 1933.

II. Periodical Literature:

2. Alta California. San Francisco, 1849-1891.
3. California Citrograph. Riverside, 1915-.
4. California Cultivator. Los Angeles and San Francisco, 1899-1934.
5. Grizzly Bear, a monthly magazine for all California. Los Angeles, 1907-.
6. Historical Society of Southern California, Publications. Los Angeles, 1897.
7. Out West. Los Angeles, 1894-1923. (1894-1901, title "Land of Sunshine").
8. Overland monthly. San Francisco, 1868-1875; 1883-.

III. General Works:

9. Brown, John and Boyd, James. History of San Bernardino and Riverside counties. 3v. Chicago, 1922.
10. Cooper, Frederic Taber. Rider's California; a guide-book for travelers..., ed. by Fremont Rider. New York, 1925.

11. Drury, Aubrey. California: an intimate guide. New York and London, 1935.
12. Newmark, Harris. Sixty years in Southern California, 1853-1913, ed. by Maurice H. Newmark (1859); Marco Ross Newmark (1878). New York, 1916.
13. Rensch, Hero Eugene, and Rensch Ethel Grace. Historic spots in California; the southern counties. Stanford University, and London 1932.
14. Saunders, Charles Francis. Finding the worthwhile in California. New York, 1916; 1930.
15. Taylor, Frank J . Land of homes. Los Angeles, 1929.

MANUSCRIPTS

16. Boyd, Jessie Edna. Historical import of the orange industry in Southern California. M. A. thesis. University of California, Berkeley, 1922.